

## My Own Shop

### Uneeda Biscuit Makers Need a Union

By A. Baker.

I am supposed to be a "baker" in one of the shops of the National Biscuit Company, but that is rather a fancy name for a man whose work consists of standing all day, with a long wooden paddle in his hands, shoving strips of cracker dough into a hot oven. It takes about two weeks to learn all there is to know about my job—after that it is only a question of getting up more speed.

The same thing is true of practically every job in the bakeshop; of every job in the whole plant for that matter. All the "skilled" work is done by machinery. This bakeshop—like all modern factories, I suppose—is operated on the "chain" system. I will describe it briefly so that you can get an idea of how many people have a hand in the making of the Uneeda Biscuit that comes to you in the pretty package.

#### The "Chain" System

First, the raw material is thrown by the truck-load into giant mixing machines and made into dough. This dough is then brought out into the bakeshop and fed into the hoppers which are at the head of the rolling machine. It goes through the rollers and comes out in thin, wide strips onto the endless canvas belt. On the way it passes under a set of dies which mark it off into the shape and pattern of crackers. Then the "peelers" pick it up on their paddles and push it into the oven. As fast as one side of the oven is filled, the other side is emptied of the baked crackers. These are put into metal trays and placed on another chain contrivance which carries them downstairs to the packing floor.

#### A New system of Labor Skinning

The National Biscuit Company has a system all of its own for handling help at small expense. The workers in the bakeshop are neither on the piece nor hour basis, but work by the day. That may not mean much until I explain the reason. The bosses have found out from experiment that nine hours is about as long as the average human being can keep going at full speed. So they established the working day at about nine hours, but they do not set any regular time for quitting

work. Here is where the joker comes in.

They prepare a batch of dough for each machine that can be finished in about nine hours if everything goes at full speed. Then they tell the workers they can go home when they get through with it. So in order to get away as soon as possible they hurry as fast as they can. They do not need any boss to drive them; they drive themselves and each other.

If you go into some factories which are run under crude methods you will hear straw-bosses bawling out the workers for being slow. But here in this up-to-date slave pen the man who is slow holds up the whole process and the others holler at him and blame him for keeping them late. The foreman here just hangs around to see that everything is moving; he regulates the speed of the machines as fast as he thinks the workers can keep up and then leaves the rest to the National Biscuit Company's self-acting system.

#### No Basis For Craft Unions

The producers of Uneeda Biscuit and other products of this company have no union of any kind. They have no voice whatever in questions of management, wages or working conditions. The Company decides all things of this kind and the workers take it or leave it as individuals. Attempts at organization have been made at different times in the past, but they have all failed for two main reasons. The first is that the Company has plants scattered all over the country and they can shut down one at any time they have trouble and have the work done in other plants. The other reason is that the only organization ever tried was a craft union of bakers, when anyone with half an eye can see that there are no such things as bakers here in the craft union sense of the word.

One Big Union is the only thing that will do us any good.

P. S. I didn't forget to mention the wages paid here. I left that out on purpose, because I am ashamed to tell you how cheap we sell our lives.